

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-67. (Cancelled)

68. (Currently amended) A suture wire supply cartridge for a suturing instrument having a drive mechanism, the suture wire supply cartridge comprising:

a length of suture wire;

a suture wire holder adapted to store at least a portion of the length of suture wire; and

an elongated suture wire guide defining a guide pathway for delivering the suture wire from the cartridge, the guide pathway having a proximal portion that includes drive openings and a distal portion that includes a tube with a delivery opening;

wherein opposed side portions of the suture wire are exposed near the drive openings such that at least a portion of the drive mechanism contacts the opposed side portions of the suture wire, when the cartridge is in the suturing instrument, so that actuation of the drive mechanism draws suture wire from the holder and pushes the suture wire distally ~~forward~~ of the drive openings along the guide pathway through the tube and through the delivery opening;

wherein the suture wire supply cartridge is separate and detachable from the suturing instrument.

69. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, further comprising:

a suture wire guide support between the elongated suture wire guide and the suture wire holder, the suture wire guide support including the drive openings, wherein the drive openings of the suture wire guide support expose the opposed side portions of the suture wire.

70. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 69, wherein the drive openings include opposed lateral openings that expose at least opposed lateral sides of suture wire extending through the suture wire guide support.

71. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, wherein the tube extends from the drive openings to the delivery opening.

72. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, adapted for removable attachment to the suturing instrument.

73. (Currently amended) A suture wire supply cartridge for a suturing instrument, the suture wire supply cartridge comprising:

a length of suture wire;

a housing adapted to store at least a portion of the length of suture wire;

a guide tube defining a guide pathway for delivering suture wire from the cartridge, the guide tube conforming closely to the suture wire; and

a guide tube support connected between the housing and the guide tube, the guide tube support having at least one opening positioned proximal to a distal end of the guide pathway and that exposes at least a portion of a side of suture wire that extends from the housing through the guide tube support, the at least one opening adapted to receive at least a portion of a drive mechanism of the suturing instrument that engages the exposed portion of the suture wire to push the suture wire forward of the opening in the guide tube;

wherein the suture wire supply cartridge is separate and detachable from the suturing instrument.

74. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 73, wherein the guide tube support includes a portion having an approximately "I" shaped cross-section.

75. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 73, wherein the opening includes opposed lateral openings that expose at least opposed lateral sides of suture wire extending through the suture wire guide support.

76. – 115. (Canceled)

116. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 71, wherein the tube closely conforms to the suture wire so as to prevent the suture wire from buckling when pushed forward.

117. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, wherein the suture wire is formed of a metal.

118. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 117, wherein the metal is steel.

119. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, wherein the guide pathway is substantially straight.

120. (Previously presented) The cartridge of claim 68, wherein the suture wire passes through the guide pathway such that the suture wire is substantially straight when the suture wire exits the delivery opening.